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## Effectiveness of river basin organizations and the inertia of traditional power distribution in the water-related bureaucracy

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### Key Message

Despite the adoption of laws to promote basin-based integrated water management, RBOs in Vietnam face difficulties in effectively performing within the context of a long existing power distribution in the country's conventional water bureaucracy and the disconnect between the new RBOs with their existing water management structure.

## Summary

Since 1998, Vietnam has adopted a series of laws designed to promote a basin-based integrated approach to water management. In 2001, eight "River Basin Planning Management Boards (RBPMBs)" have been established in eight basins. The RBPMBs act as coordinating bodies under the responsibility of the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development (MARD). However, as it turns out their roles and mandates and their positions in the administrative system of water sector remain ill-defined and their contribution to the improvement of water resources management in the basin practically nil. In December 2008, a new decree on River Basin Management was approved by the Government of Vietnam, including the management of river basins to protect the environment as well as the regulation

and distribution of water resources. At present, there are changes underway in the RBO arrangement which would operationalize IWRM in river basin in a more meaningful and practical way. But so far no new RBO arrangement has been executed under this new decree for two major reasons: (1) establishment of new RBOs has run up against the existing administrative system of WRM that resists sharing traditional bureaucratic power; and, (2) the linkage between the model and the existing institutions remains unclear. This case examines the challenges of introducing effective and operational RBOs as innovative institutions in the context of a long existing power distribution in the water bureaucracy that does not yield easily to changes.